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Title of Hearing: Medicare Durable Medical Equipment Competitive Bidding Program
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Dear Ways and Means, Health Committee Members,

I am an eighty year old Medicare beneficiary, with type 2 diabetes and I am a victim of Round One of Medicare's bidding program. I have used diabetic testing supplies daily for the past 12 years and I reside in Delray Beach, Florida, part of the Miami Bidding Area. I felt compelled to submit written comments to set the record straight about my ordeal trying to get diabetic supplies from bid winners in my area. I am now receiving supplies, hand delivered from a local non-winning provider, but I have concerns when the national mail order program begins next year and my current provider will not be able to hand deliver my diabetic testing supplies anymore.

For years I never worried about receiving my diabetic testing supplies, because my son owned an accredited home medical company in South Florida. Unfortunately, my son's company was awarded a contract in the Oxygen category, but ended up closing his company on April 30, 2011; and that's when my problems began.

Despite testimony in your hearing from Mr. Laurence Wilson, I did not have "stockpiles of diabetic testing supplies on my shelf." As a matter of fact, even though my endocrinologist gave me a prescription to test twice a day (which I sometimes do), my own son refused to provide me and bill Medicare that quantity. That is because, as my son explained, the doctor's notes did not specifically detail the precise wording for medical need in her notes required by auditors. I know that Medicare previously audited my simple one-test-a-day order and on several quarterly supplies I received, my son's company was never paid.

When the last 90 day supply provided by my son's company began to run out, I could not find a bid winner willing to provide my brand. I repeatedly called the 1-800-MEDICARE number and was given a list of companies that were supposed to help me. Some bid winners did not answer their phones and others just had an answering machine. Finally, one company contacted me back, but said that they could not provide my brand of strips. I was very surprised because about four years earlier, I had to give up the brand my doctor first prescribed. It was a very popular brand advertised on television, but about four years before competitive bidding began, my son told me that cuts in Medicare reimbursement meant he would have to take a fifty dollar loss for my quarterly supplies.

My son switched me to a brand that he said that he would not take a loss on and it worked very well. Unfortunately, the one bid winner that was willing to work with me said that he could not provide me my regular brand of testing strips because it cost more than the Medicare reimbursement. My son told me that the bid winners are required to provide the brand I need and that I should call 1-800-MEDICARE to complain. I called back 1-800-MEDICARE several times to complain and was redirected over and over again but was unable to record my complaint with anyone.

Desperate for my diabetic testing supplies, I decided to switch to the brand now offered from the bid winner and it did not work properly and forced me to waste test strips. The glucometer was very cumbersome, bulky and hard to use. I wasted one out of every three strips because if you did not hit the blood on the tip of the strip properly, it did not work. I would have called back Medicare to complain, but is anyone listening?

My son ended up contacting the manufacturer for the brand that I have used for the past four years, and I was referred to a company willing to drive the supplies to my home, and therefore bill Medicare at the non-bid rate. Unfortunately I am told that "loophole" will end when the program expands nationally on July 1, 2013. Then what am I supposed to do?

Can you please have Mr. Wilson answer that question for me?

I kindly ask the committee members to contact beneficiaries like me from Round One and find out what we think about Medicare's bidding program and consider changes to the program so I do not have to relive the same scenario next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Lawrence I Brant
Delray Beach, Florida